

Beef in the bog

You will find an overwhelming number of recipes for boeuf bourguignon, for beef casserole and daube of beef and so on. So much is written about the importance of method and ingredients and how it 'ought to be done'. However, we can also just enjoy good simple ingredients cooked in a method that brings out the best in the beef cuts we use.

Go to the butcher's, farm shop, or good retailer where you can buy organic grass-fed beef. Ask for a cheaper cut, but not brisket for this dish – you could use shin, or some braising cuts. You might want 1 kg per 4 to 5 people, but adjust quantities to suit your numbers and appetites. The dish also keeps for a week in the fridge.

Ingredients

1 kg beef, cut into cubes of around 2.5 cms or more
 100 g salt pork lardons or streaky bacon if fine
 2 or 3 onions diced or 300 g shallots are very lovely instead
 300 g carrots diced
 3 cloves garlic crushed
 A handful of mushrooms
 A good squeeze of tomato puree
 Half bottle red wine – any decent table wine will do
 A slice of orange peel if you like, skin without the pith. It adds a lovely top flavour
 A couple of bay leaves, some mixed herbs, fresh is wonderful but dry is just fine, salt, pepper, juniper berries if you have a few, and a stick of celery doesn't go amiss if you have one. Heat the oven to 160 deg C

Method

Use a heavy bottom pan if possible to fry off the lardons or bacon until crispy. Take them out, leaving the oil and add chunks of beef and brown on all sides. I know it's tempting to add all the beef, but it's much better if you do no more chunks than will cover the bottom of the pan with a bit of space for turning. Place all beef with the lardons in a bowl once fried or browned. Add a little wine to the pan to deglaze and pour over the fried meats.

Give your pan a bit of a wipe and then add some olive oil.

Fry the onions slowly until they are soft, add garlic and herbs and fry a little longer. Now replace the meat along with the carrots, mushrooms, tomato puree and orange peel if using. Season with salt and pepper and add a few juniper berries. Pour in your red wine, bring to a simmer and stir gently for a couple of minutes. Put it in the oven and leave for at least 3 hours. (If your pan doesn't go in the oven you will need to transfer the mixture to a casserole dish.)

The meat will be soft but not falling apart, the carrots will have absorbed lots of flavour and added their sweetness to the whole dish.

Serve with beautifully mashed potato and greens.

